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AUTHOR Barker, Bruce; Beckner, Weldon
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ABSTRACT

A self-administered questionnaire was used to assess the degree to which teacher training programs in 4-year public colleges and universities include rural education as part of their teacher education program. Questionnaires were mailed to college of education deans and chairpersons at each of the 473 4-year public colleges and universities in the United States, and 306 usable responses were received for a return rate of 64.7%. The Statistical Analysis System computer program for the social sciences was used to list frequency distributions and to calculate the mean, standard deviation, and range for variables from the questionnaire. A total of 13,613 education faculty members were reported as working at the institutions surveyed. Of these, only 257--less than 2%--focused their research and/or publication interests on rural education. Only 87 institutions included rural education as part of their curriculum, and only 9 reported a course devoted solely to the study of rural or small schools. On the other hand, respondents recognized a need to pay greater attention to rural education. Nearly half agreed that teaching in small schools is different than teaching in urban and suburban schools and requires different preparation, and 34% felt their institutions should make provisions for the training of prospective rural teachers. The survey instrument is appended. (JHZ)

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RURAL EDUCATION PRESERVICE TRAINING: A SURVEY OF PUBLIC TEACHER TRAINING INSTITUTIONS IN THE UNITED STATES

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By

Dr. Bruce Barker

Dr. Weldon Beckner

National Center for Smaller Schools
College of Education
Texas Tech University
Lubbock, Texas 79409

RC 015478

RURAL EDUCATION PRESERVICE TRAINING: A SURVEY OF PUBLIC TEACHER TRAINING INSTITUTIONS IN THE UNITED STATES

Introduction

The preparation of teachers to teach in rural schools--or the lack thereof--is a well documented concern faced by many rural school administrators (Edington, 1983; Massey and Crosby, 1983; Gardener and Edington, 1982; Helge, 1982; Muse and Stonehocker, 1979). The matter is a serious one in light of the fact that over two-thirds of our nation's public school systems are located in areas designated as "rural" (NCES, 1980). These school systems serve more than one-fourth of America's school aged youngsters--those who reside in the open countryside and in communities with fewer than 2500 people (Jess, 1984). In addition, nearly one-third of all public school teachers in the U.S. serve predominantly rural constituencies (Massey and Crosby, 1983).

Although the basics of instruction are similar in urban, suburban, and rural schools, there are important demands of the rural instructional setting which are different. Teachers are generally more isolated from ongoing developments in their field and from other teachers with similar subject matter expertise. The cultural and geographical isolation, common to many rural areas; is thereby compounded by a sense of professional isolation. Secondary teachers typically teach a wider range of courses than their urban or suburban counterparts and, of necessity, take on added extra curricular assignments--usually without compensation. Elementary teachers are likely to teach two or more grade levels in the same classroom and do so without the assistance of teacher aides. It is not unusual for rural teachers to be called upon to teach a class or subject in which they are not adequately trained and receive little, if any, inservice support.

Rural teachers often experience difficulty in locating adequate housing when assigned to a small community and may later have difficulty selling property should they move to another location. In addition, small towns and communities limit privacy, making teachers much more visible in the communities in which they live and work. Due to limited resources, rural educators are frequently required to use outdated and/or inadequate supplies in their teaching. Finally, salaries for rural teachers, on the average, are 20-25% lower than those received by urban and suburban teachers.

These differences cannot be generalized to all teaching situations, yet are unique commonalities shared by most rural schools. Despite the large number of students who attend rural schools and the teachers who work therein, few institutions of higher education have teacher training programs which are designed specifically for rural education. Some institutions have indicated they would never develop such an effort because it would be inappropriate for them to do so (Horn, 1981). This may be because most large universities are located in metropolitan areas where their education faculties conduct research and maintain interests in urban or suburban schools close at hand. Another reason may be that rural schools have traditionally received an inequitable share of federal research dollars. In 1978, Sher reported that only five percent of the Federal research monies for education actually went to rural schools. It is expected that this situation will change with the Department of Education's announcement in 1983 of a "Rural Education Policy for the 1980's" which promises that "Rural education shall receive an equitable share of the information services, assistance, and funds available from and through the Department of Education and it programs" (Rural Education Policy, 1983, page 6).

Other institutions, especially those composed of largely rural constituencies, have expressed the need for special training programs for

rural teachers. Those with actual programs, however, are startling few. Sher (1977) stated that only a handful of teacher training programs prepared teachers for rural areas. Muse and Stonehocker (1979) reported that only six universities in the entire country offered courses designed specifically for students who planned rural teaching careers. A review of the literature does identify between 20-25 institutions which include some aspect of rural education as part of their teacher training program (Gardener and Edington, 1982, Helge, 1982; Hoyt, 1981; Miller and Sidebottom, 1985). According to Guenther and Weible (1983), however, few institutions cited in the literature as having active rural teacher preparation programs actually do so. Guenther and Weible wrote letters to 25 colleges and universities they identified from the literature as having rural education oriented programs. Of the institutions which responded, only one actually had an ongoing program. The others, though recognizing the need for a separate preparation, either never had one in actual practice to begin with or had discontinued their program altogether.

Purpose of Study

The data currently available, suggest that teacher training programs in our nation's colleges and universities are overwhelmingly unresponsive to the training needs of prospective rural teachers. It has been suggested, however that teacher preparation programs at small four-year colleges and universities located in nonmetropolitan areas may be actively preparing students for careers in rural schools (Massey and Crosby, 1983). Since writing for publication at such institutions is neither expected nor highly encouraged, Massey and Crosby infer that much of what is being done is not disseminated and therefore goes unrecognized.

The purpose of this study was to assess the degree to which teacher training programs in our nation's four-year public colleges and universities include

rural education as part of their teacher education curriculum. Specific research questions posed for the study included:

1. What percent of education graduates accept jobs in rural settings?

2. How many education faculty members are involved in rural education research?

3. How many institutions offer a special course(s) directly related to rural school teaching?

4. What is the perceived need by education deans and chairpersons to implement practices or programs specifically designed for prospective rural teachers.

Methodology and Treatment

A 26-item self-administered questionnaire was designed, pre-tested and revised by the researchers for the purpose of gathering responsive and relevant data. A mailing list, purchased from the National Center for Education Statistics, indicated a total of 473 public four-year colleges and universities across the United States (Digest of Education Statistics, 1985). Questionnaires were mailed to the attention of college of education deans and department of education chairpersons at each of the 473 institutions. Usable responses were received from 306 for a return of 64.7 percent. In proportion to the total universe of America's public four-year colleges and universities, the number of questionnaires returned reflects a .95 level of confidence (Krejcie and Morgan, 1970). Questionnaires were returned from institutions of higher education across 48 different states.

The Statistical Analysis System (SAS) computer program for the social sciences was used to list the frequency distributions; and to calculate the mean, standard deviation, and range for each of the variables taken from the questionnaire. The study was conducted under the auspices of the National Center for Smaller Schools at Texas Tech University and was endorsed by the national Rural Education Association. Data collection for this study occurred

during the summer months of 1985. This study was limited to public teacher training institutions. Private colleges and universities were not surveyed.

Findings

Of the 306 respondents participating in the survey, 72.1 percent were college of education deans at public universities. The remaining 27.9 percent were education chairpersons at four-year public colleges. The mean institutional enrollment size was 7681 students. The median was 5800 students. Over 60 percent of the institutions were in communities of less than 50,000 people. In fact, 50 percent were in communities of fewer than 35,000 inhabitants and 30 percent were in communities of less than 15,500.

A total of 217,295 students were reported as enrolled in undergraduate teacher training programs, resulting in an average of 710 students per institution. Of these, a mean of 176 students at each institution completed student teaching during the 1984-85 academic year. An average of 76 students (43.2 percent) from each school, student taught in communities of less than 25,000 people. Regarding actual placement of graduates who sought teaching careers, deans and chairpersons reported that approximately 25 percent secured positions in small communities with fewer than 2500 people, 35 percent in communities between 2500-25,000, and 40 percent in cities larger than 25,000.

The total number of education faculty members represented among the participating institutions was 13,613. The mean for each school was 46. The number of faculty members who focused their research and/or publication interests on rural education or small schools was alarmingly low. Of the total education faculty population, only 257 or less than two percent, were identified. In fact, in over two-thirds of the institutions surveyed, there was not one single faculty member researching or writing in the area. Only 93 of the 306 institutions had faculty members pursuing rural interests, and in 59 of these schools the number was limited to one or two. Similarly,

over 70 percent of the institutions neither provided special topics nor a course(s) in the preparation of teachers for a rural setting. The vast majority of the 87 institutions which did include rural education as a part of their curriculum did so only as a special topic or subset of a more general course. Only nine institutions actually reported a course(s) devoted solely to the study of rural or small schools.

Although very few colleges offer courses designed to prepare teachers for rural careers and few education faculty members make a study of rural education, many deans and chairpersons seem to recognize a need to focus greater attention on rural education. On the questionnaire, respondents were presented the following two statements and asked to indicate the extent to which they either agreed or disagreed with each: (a) "Teaching in a small school is different than teaching in a large school and needs a different preparation;" and (b) "Provisions should be provided by our institution to train teachers for small/rural schools." Responses were based on a Likert-type scale of "1" to "5" where "1" represented "strongly disagree" and "5" represented "strongly agree." Almost 50 percent (48.8) agreed that teaching was different in small schools compared to large ones and indeed needed a different preparation. In addition, 33.9 percent felt their institution should make provisions for the training of prospective rural teachers (See Table 1).

Finally, deans and chairpersons were presented a list of selected areas of teacher education--identifed in the literature as important aspects of rural teacher training--and asked to indicate the degree to which such areas were currently viewed as being important at their institution in preparing teachers for the profession. Again, responses were based on a scale of "1"

TABLE 1

NEED TO FOCUS MORE ATTENTION ON RURAL AND SMALL SCHOOLS. ATTITUDES OF PUBLIC COLLEGE OF EDUCATION DEANS AND CHAIRPERSONS, 1985. REPORTED ON A SCALE OF "1" TO "5" WHERE "1" REPRESENTS "STRONGLY DISAGREE" AND "5" REPRESENTS "STRONGLY AGREE."

STATEMENT	STRONGLY DISAGREE 1		MILDLY DISAGREE 2		NEUTRAL 3		MILDLY AGREE 4		STRONGLY AGREE 5	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
Teaching in a small school is different than teaching in a large school and needs a different preparation	12	4.0	42	14.2	98	33.0	82	27.6	63	21.2
Provisions should be provided by our institution to train teachers for small/rural schools	38	12.6	67	22.3	94	31.2	68	22.6	34	11.3

to '5," with "1" representing "no emphasis" given and "5" representing "great emphasis given." Among the areas of teacher preparation listed, "practical methods courses" were rated four or above by 283 of the deans/chairpersons (94.3 percent). Breakdown for the other areas of teacher preparation was: "Training to recognize and appropriately refer exceptional children," 252 institutions (84.2 percent); "better preparation in two or more subject areas, 198 institutions (67.5 percent); "training that helps teachers understand the role of the community in American society," 195 institutions (64.9 percent); "learning to teach with limited resources," 92 institutions (31.2 percent); "practicum or student teaching in a rural setting," 86 institutions (28.7 percent); "ability to teach two or more grades in the same room," 49 institutions (16.5 percent); "course work directly related to rural school teaching," 39 institutions (13.0 percent); and "exposure to a course in rural sociology," 37 institutions (12.3 percent). (See Table 2).

Conclusions

Findings from this study were based on responses from education deans and chairpersons representing almost two-thirds of America's public universities and four-year colleges. Research results suggest that many of our nation's public supported teacher training institutions do include aspects of their preparation which directly apply toward preparing teachers for rural areas. This is especially true in regards to providing practical methods courses and in helping prospective teachers recognize and properly refer learning disabled, special education, and exceptional children. Most programs are also geared to help future teachers understand the role of the community in our society and to be prepared to teach in an age of limited resources and funding. On the other hand, most programs fail to place much emphasis on field experiences or practicums in rural settings.

TABLE 2

AREAS OF TEACHER EDUCATION GIVEN ATTENTION AT PUBLIC TEACHER TRAINING INSTITUTIONS AS PERCEIVED BY COLLEGE OF EDUCATION DEANS AND CHAIRPERSONS, 1985. REPORTED ON A SCALE OF "1" TO "5" WHERE "1" REPRESENTS "NO EMPHASIS GIVEN" AND "5" REPRESENTS "GREAT EMPHASIS GIVEN."

AREAS OF PREPARATION	NO EMPHASIS 1		LITTLE EMPHASIS 2		SOME EMPHASIS 3		CONSIDERABLE EMPHASIS 4		GREAT EMPHASIS 5	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
Practical Methods Courses	3	1.0	4	1.3	10	3.4	75	25.1	207	69.2
Learning to teach with limited resources	2	0.7	26	8.6	116	38.7	114	38.0	42	14.0
More preparation in guidance and counseling of students	8	2.7	56	19.0	139	47.1	72	24.4	20	6.8
Better preparatior in two or more subject matter fields	3	1.0	23	7.8	70	23.8	117	39.8	81	27.6
Exposure to a course in rural sociology	99	33.0	95	31.7	69	23.0	31	10.3	6	2.0
Ability to teach two or more grade levels in the same room	66	22.1	95	31.9	88	29.5	38	12.8	11	3.7

TABLE 2 (Continued)

AREAS OF PREPARATION	NO EMPHASIS 1		LITTLE EMPHASIS 2		SOME EMPHASIS 3		CONSIDERALBE EMPHASIS 4		GREAT EMPHASIS 5	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
Training to recognize and appropriately refer exceptional children	2	0.7	5	1.7	40	13.4	125	41.8	127	42.4
Training that helps teachers understand the role of the community in American Society	2	0.7	17	5.7	86	28.7	124	41.3	71	23.6
Practicum or student teaching in a rural setting	66	22.0	55	18.3	93	31.0	60	20.0	26	8.7
Course work directly related to rural school teaching	89	29.7	89	29.7	83	27.7	33	11.0	6	2.0

Lack of emphasis is also given to providing skills in guidance and counseling. The same is true in terms of preparing teachers for multigrade instruction in the same classroom, in offering coursework in rural sociology, and in providing special topics or courses on rural education. In fact, less than three percent of the institutuions offered courses directly related to rural teaching.

Comparatively speaking, relatively few public higher education faculty members (1.9 percent) are actively conducting research or writing in the area of rural education and small schools. A careful examination of journal articles published in the last five years in the field causes one to suspect that even the two percent figure is grossly inflated.

Despite these somewhat disheartening findings, almost one in two public college of education deans/chairpersons agree that teaching in a rural or small school is different than teaching in a large school and does require a different preparation. And one in three agree that their college should make provisions to prepare teachers for careers in rural schools. Such attitudes are encouraging and offer hope for change, yet most teacher education programs continue to train teachers to go to urban or suburban areas.

The National Center for Education Statistics predicts that 1.65 million new teachers will be hired over the next eight years (Jacobson, 1985). Due to the continuing urban to rural migration turnaround occurring in our country (Beale, 1975) more and more teachers will be accepting positions in nonmetropolitan areas. Of necessity, the preparation of teachers for rural schools must be given increased attention. It is good that many leaders in our public colleges and departments of education recognize the need to include rural education as a part of their preservice programs. Good intentions and lip service, however, are only remotely related to action. It is good to recognize problems; it is enlightening to want to improve. But sooner

or later there comes a time when it is performance that counts--not promises, not potentialities, not good intentions. Now is the time for leaders of our teacher training institutions to adjust or alter existing programs to include aspects of rural and small school preparation as significant components. This is especially true for institutions in largely rural states where funding from state legislatures is to serve all people in the state, not just those in metropolitan centers. Unless more meaningful attention is given to rural school career preparation, our nation is likely to become a "nation of even greater risk."

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APPENDIX

RURAL EDUCATION PRESERVICE TRAINING SURVEY

The purpose of this questionnaire is to gather information about the teacher education program at your college/university as it relates to teaching in rural settings. Please answer each question listed below. CIRCLE the appropriate answer, or WRITE IN the answer(s) when requested.

General Information

Name of Institution _____

Location: City _____ State _____

Circle one: 4 year institution only University

Approximate enrollment _____

****

1. What is the approximate population of the community in which your institution is located? (Write in) _____
2. How large (number of full-time teachers) is your education faculty? _____ teachers
3. Approximately how many students are enrolled in your undergraduate teacher education program? _____ students
4. ESTIMATE the number of students graduating from your institution who typically secure teaching positions in:

   a) communities of less than 2500 people _____ number of students

   b) communities of 2500-25,000 people _____ number of students

   c) communities in excess of 25,000 people _____ number of students

5. ESTIMATE the number of faculty members on your staff who specialize in rural education research and publish in the area of rural education and/or small schools. _____ faculty
6. As part of your teacher preparation program, do you include special topics or courses devoted to the preparation of teachers for a rural setting? YES NO

   If a special course in rural education is offered, please list title of course(s) and number of semester credit hours.

   TITLE: _____ Credit hours _____

   _____ _____

   _____ _____

7. ESTIMATE the number of students at your institution who will student teach this year _____ students.

   Based on question #7, ESTIMATE the number of students who will do their student teaching in communities of less than 25,000 population _____ students.

8. Listed below are selected areas of teacher education. On a Likert-type scale of "1" to "5" where "1" represents "no emphasis needed" and "5" represents "great emphasis needed," please indicate the degree to which you feel the area of teacher training noted is important at your institution to prepare teachers for the profession.

	No Emphasis				Great Emphasis
a) Practical methods courses	1	2	3	4	5
b) Learning to teach with limited instructional resources	1	2	3	4	5
c) More preparation in guidance and counseling of students	1	2	3	4	5
d) Better preparation in two or more subject matter fields	1	2	3	4	5
e) Exposure to a course in rural sociology	1	2	3	4	5
f) Ability to teach two or more grades in the same room	1	2	3	4	5
g) Training to recognize and appropriately refer exceptional children	1	2	3	4	5
h) Skills that help teachers integrate the curriculum	1	2	3	4	5
i) Training that helps teachers understand the role of the community in American society	1	2	3	4	5
j) Practicum or student teaching in rural setting	1	2	3	4	5
k) Other course work directly related to rural school teaching	1	2	3	4	5

9. Based on you knowledge and perception, please indicate on a scale of "1" to "5," the extent to which you either agree or disagree with each of the following statements.

	Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree
a) Teaching in a small school is different than teaching in a large school and needs a different preparation.	1	2	3	4	5
b) Provisions should be provided by our institution to train teachers for small/rural schools.	1	2	3	4	5

10. COMMENTS (optional--attach extra sheet of paper if necessary)